School Programs Commodity Update

What's New in the Food Distribution Program for Schools

Responding to a Commodity Recall

When a commodity recall occurs, it is important to move quickly and put the product on hold to make sure that you do not serve food that might cause illness. If you are involved in the recall, your State distributing agency will send you information to identify the recalled food product immediately.

Recalls are for specific foods from a named manufacturer or source. The State will provide information such as the affected product's delivery date, lot number, product code, pack date (if available), the run or code number, and (for meats and poultry) the establishment number. Using this information, you will need to determine how much of the involved product you have in inventory and what may have been served. The food product must be put on hold until you know the final action.

The information the State will provide you is included on the label of the product case or outer container. Therefore, it is important that school food service personnel familiarize themselves with reading manufacturers' labels.

The National Food Service Management Institute has produced a resource guide entitled *Responding to a Food Recall*. This guide has been distributed to school district central offices nationwide. Please refer to it for more detailed information. Appendix 8 of the manual includes an explanation of how to read a label to identify a food product.

If you have not received the guide, you can access it on the National Food Service Management Institute's web site at www.nfsmi.org address. Once in the site, click on "What's New," then go to "Resources" and click on either "Manual," "Brochure," or "Poster."

USDA is Requiring Traceability for Food Safety of Donated Commodities

As you know, manufacturers have the option of using commercial labels on all USDA donated commodity products. If manufacturers use commercial labels on commodities, they must use a traceability system. A traceability system enables the manufacturer to determine the production plant and the day and time that a product was produced.

USDA requires a traceability system for its donated commodities to facilitate trace back for food safety reasons or if there is a problem with the quality of commodities.

Most food manufacturers put coded information on food packaging to readily identify their products. USDA requires manufacturers to place the traceability code on the outer container of commodities. With this information, producers can identify faulty product to the time of production. If a food safety or quality problem is encountered, the information can help to quickly identify the questionable product.

Commodity Complaint Hotline

1-800-446-6991

or email

usda-fns-commoditycomplaints@fns.usda.gov

Safe Food Handling Information is a Phone Call Away

There are two Federal Government hotlines that answer questions about safe food handling.

For fruit and vegetable products and seafood safety, call the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) at 1-800-FDA-4010.

Meat and poultry safety information can be obtained from USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) Meat and Poultry Hotline by dialing 1-800-535-4555. This toll-free telephone service, which began in 1985, helps prevent foodborne illness specifically by answering questions about the safe storage, handling, and preparation of meat, poultry, and egg products.

Nationwide Rollout of The Electronic Commodity Ordering System

USDA expects to rollout the automated web-based ordering system nationwide this school year. The Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS) allows State agencies to electronically transmit commodity orders directly into a centralized USDA food ordering computer system. State agencies can also use ECOS to allow recipient agencies to electronically submit commodity requests, although most States will not use this function in the first year of rollout.

USDA expects to begin the rollout in January 2003, and will provide technical assistance using both a hotline and an email help desk. Training materials will be available on-line, and will systematically walk users through the system and its functions.

Federal, State, and school district representatives developed ECOS. California, Virginia, Connecticut, and Illinois State agencies have tested ECOS since May 2002.

Bonus Commodities for Schools

USDA is making some interesting bonus products available to schools. This year schools are being offered the following frozen pork products: sloppy joe mix, taco filling, and breaded patties. They will be delivered to state facilities January thru April 2003. These are very versatile products that can be used in many ways. The fact sheets for these products are posted on our web site at www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/

Trail mix is also being offered. The trail mix will consist of dried cranberries, date pieces, fig pieces, plum pieces, and English walnut pieces. Deliveries to state facilities are from November 2002 thru June 2003.

BROWSE NEW ITEMS ON FDP'S WEB SITE

The Food Distribution Programs' web site continues to grow. If you access the USDA FNS web site at www.fns.usda.gov/fns/ and click on Food Distribution you will find:

- A new commodity fact sheet for Diced Frozen Strawberries in individual serving size.
- A new commodity fact sheet for Frozen Breaded Pork Patties.
- A new commodity fact sheet for Pork Taco Filling.
- A new commodity fact sheet for Pork Sloppy Joe mix.
- A new commodity fact sheet for Frozen Breaded Catfish Strips.
- A new commodity fact sheet for Frozen Whole Cranberries.
- A new commodity fact sheet for White Latin American Cheese.

- An updated Food Safety web page to provide an update on the latest Listeria information.
- An update to the Commodity Complaint hotline page on "Donated Food that Arrives in a Commercial Label."

Comments

If you have any questions or comments on our products or service, we have an internet address specifically for this purpose: *fdd-pst@fns.usda.gov* or you can write to Food Distribution Division, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 520, Alexandria, VA 22302.

Acronym List

ECOS	Electronic Commodity Ordering System
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
FDP	Food Distribution Programs
FNS	Food and Nutrition Service
FSIS	Food Safety and Inspection Service
PCIMS	Processed Commodities Inventory Management System
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

Prepared by: Program Support Branch, in conjunction with Schools and Institutions Branch and the PCIMS Group, USDA, FNS, FDD